

# Forging Iron Leaders<sub>at PLDC</sub>

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GRAFENWOEHR, Germany —Freezing rain stings exposed flesh, drenching battle dress uniforms and rucksacks, soaking soldiers to the bone. Muddy boots slog through blankets of decaying leaves and needles of an alpine forest.

Moving as cautiously as their weary legs can carry them, Primary Leadership Development Course students advance stealthily in wedge formation on the way to their objective.

Anticipating an ambush at any moment, soldiers glance back, making sure the enemy hasn't infiltrated the formation.

Ahead, bloodshot eyes peer from the fresh-spring undergrowth as trigger fingers await the order to open fire. Machine gun fire erupts from the barrel of an M60. Soldiers dash for cover, crashing through bushes, diving into muddy ditches.

Soldiers quickly don protective masks as canisters of smoke billow colored clouds, fanning the flames of the chaos of battle. Bursts of M16 fire chime in on a symphony of simulated death and destruction.

"You're dead, squad leader! Take off your Kevlar and twitch like a dying cockroach!" yells Staff Sgt. Milton H. Brooks, Small Group Leader, Company C, 7th Army NCO Academy during the PLDC Field Training Exercise. "Alpha team leader, you're in charge!"

Responding to Brooks' instructions, Spc. Grisel Ruiz, a court



*Locked, cocked and ready to rock, PLDC students fan out into a wedge formation while on patrol during the leadership evaluation of their field training exercise. Students are masked and prepared for possible chemical attack.*

reporter with HHC, 1st Armored Division, takes the reigns of command and begins her leadership evaluation. Under pressure from gunfire, disorienting smoke and fatigue, she makes her way through the squad seeking accountability and status of her soldiers.

Soldier after soldier from Grisel's squad roll over and remove their Kevlar helmets as she desperately radios her situation to higher. Finally, succumbing to overwhelming odds, Grisel smiles and removes her helmet.

"ENDEX!" yells Brooks. PLDC students echo the command of ENDEX, letting everyone know the skirmish is over.

This was a scene played out during the March 2001 Primary Leadership Development Course.

"Here is where we move the classroom to the field," explained

Brooks. "We thrive on basic skills here. It's all about leadership—leaders leading leaders—leaders teaching leaders."

The FTX is the culmination of PLDC training. Common task skills, leadership skills and stamina are all tested during the FTX.

"Soldiers need to come to PLDC prepared. They need to know common task skills. Our job is to refine those skills," explained Staff Sgt. Manuel E. Rosas, SGL, Co. C, 7th Army NCOA and instructing partner to Brooks. "We get a lot of soldiers who don't know common task skills. It's the soldiers' units and supervisors who are responsible for preparing soldiers for PLDC—preparing responsible soldiers."

"Land navigation is a Skill Level 1 task in which all soldiers are supposed to be proficient," ex-

plained Command Sgt. Maj. Robert R. McCord, Commandant, 7th Army NCOA. "Yet, land navigation remains one of the top reasons for failing PLDC."

"Supervisors need to take the time to counsel and teach soldiers," agreed Brooks, an instructor who has never lost a student for academics. "Soldiers should be responsible before they come to PLDC. Checking on soldiers' responsible alcohol consumption, or other things a future NCO should have in check, should not be our priority as instructors—training NCOs is."

"There are many soldiers like me who don't get to do this stuff in their everyday jobs," said Spc. Grisel. "I had a lot of fun during PLDC, but I recommend brushing up on common task skills and road marching before attending. This really takes dedication."

*Fighting the morale-dampening conditions of freezing rain and suffering from sleep deprivation, Spc. Chester E. Greathouse, field artillery radar fire finder, Battery B, 1-94 Field Artillery (MLRS), keeps his spirits up and his smile hidden as he plods along anticipating an ambush from rival PLDC forces.*